

Au Revoire, Noir
By Mark Bellusci

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CHARACTERS:

DIRK. Somber and dark, in a Fedora and weathered raincoat.

BILLY. Nerdy, with a pocket protector and plenty of pencils.

SCENE:

A small, sparse studio. Two chairs flank a small table with a bottle of whiskey and a tumbler. Also on the table is a tape recorder and a notebook PC.

AT RISE:

BILLY, tied up and gagged, squirms and squeals. DIRK sits at the PC, types, pauses, then pounds the table. He pours a whiskey down it. Finally, DIRK gets up and roughly removes the gag from BILLY's mouth.

DIRK.

Something to say?

BILLY

I ... What are ... I don't--

DIRK

Guess not. (He begins to put the gag back on.)

BILLY

Please! I'm claustrophobic! Asthmatic! Synthetic fiber sensitive!

DIRK

(Chuckles.) "Synthetic fiber sensitive." Kind of mug uses that one?

BILLY

Rayons and dacrons make my skin hyper-sensitive to--

DIRK

Close that claptrap, or you'll be enjoying a high-fiber feast. (HE gestures to the cloth gag.)

BILLY

Look, if it's money, I -- my mom, she could borrow something, I'm sure. But, I mean, I live over a garage; how much money could I possibly have --

DIRK

Spear me the monologue, Buster Brown.

(BILLY stops talking. DIRK hunts and pecks at the keyboard. While doing so, his right hand swipes at an imaginary carriage return, found on older typewriters. After a few moments, he stops. He then hits the space bar once, then often, with more emphasis each time.)

DIRK

(To himself.) Froze. First roll in weeks, shot to hell.

BILLY

Maybe a warm boot?

DIRK

(Resigned chuckle.) You know what "a warm boot" used to mean? A send-off by a dame.

BILLY

Oh, I ...

DIRK

I know. Can't use the word, "dame" any more.

BILLY

I don't care if you--

DIRK

Women want to be called women, fine. Hell, what they've taken from mugs like us over the years, I don't blame them.

BILLY

Uh, sure.

DIRK

But still, the words we lost: "Sugar. Sweet stuff. Gals ..." (Looking off into the distance.) "She had a pair of gams that started in the cellar and climbed through the penthouse."

BILLY

Gams? That some kind of ladder?

DIRK

(Sighing and shaking his head.) Why do I even try? (He gets up to put the gag back on BILLY.)

BILLY

No! Not that. I'll say whatever you want. *Do whatever you want.*

DIRK

Hell else can you do? You've already turned me into a dead man walking.

BILLY

No, you're -- a little -- you have me confused with someone else.

DIRK

Nah, you're the mug. You and your type, get me?

BILLY

Yeah, but -- see, I couldn't have hurt you -- or anyone else. I'm a pacifist vegan and --

DIRK

A "vegan?" How am I supposed to work with that?

BILLY

Work with what?

DIRK

(He types.)

"It was a cold, dead-as-nails burger joint. The scar laden, butt smoking short-order cook yelled over a cacophony of grease splatter, "What'll you have, Mac? I ordered a ... tofu patty and julienne veggies?"

BILLY

I'm sorry, I don't understand--

DIRK

Why do I even try? Listen up. (Turns on the tape recorder.) "He walked into the phone booth, slipped a nickel into the slot and jawed with the operator." (He then types.) "He hit autodial on his cell." (BILL shakes his head, still confused. DIRK plays the tape.) "He got a telegram." (HE then types.) "He got an IM."

BILLY

I got it! You're a technical writer, chronicling the great advances of technology and --

DIRK

Great? That techno-babble is killing every phrase in the book, son. Destroying the very place I come from.

BILLY

Where is that?

DIRK

A world of character, get me? Of mystery and intrigue. Of subtle shades of gray. A world of noir, see?

BILLY

A world ... of noir?

DIRK

A world you're burying.

BILLY

No! I love noir. Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Philip Marlowe, The Thin Man.

DIRK

They don't belong here anymore. It's all you now.

BILLY

But I'm a nobody. Tech support guy by day, gamer by night, geek 24 hours a day.

DIRK

And today's last hope for noir.

BILLY

Come on. Look at me. The only muscle I have is in my mouse finger.

DIRK

In today's world, you're the tough guy.

BILLY

Wait a minute: you couldn't have mistaken me for Everyone knows I'm not See, my name is *Billy Gate*, not Bill--

DIRK

I know he's the big enchilada. But in this business, down-on-their-luck loners are the *modis operandi*.

BILLY

Modis operandi for what?

DIRK

For the last stand. The final fight. One more shot to write modern noir, or die trying.

BILLY

I don't want to die!

DIRK

You ain't the one dying. All you have to do is be the technical consultant.

BILLY

How do I do that?

DIRK

Well first, you escape.

BILLY

But you're holding the ... (points to the gun.)

DIRK

(He puts the gun down.) Not anymore. Now I'm writing. (Typing as he narrates.) "He was a pale, sickly, slip of a sad sack. With a whiny voice and a wimpish demeanor."

BILLY

What, you think I like being this way? Working a million hours for no pay, no social life, eating mom's macaroni and cheese every night, waiting for that big break?

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "But that all was about to change. Because *this* was his big break."

BILLY

Being kidnapped is your idea of--

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "At first, he continued his woe-is-me wimpishness. But sometimes, you either change -- or die."

BILLY

Wait! You said you wouldn't kill me.

DIRK

Never said I'd free you, either.

BILLY

Then what do I--

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "Then, a voice from inside said, "Shut up and escape!"

BILLY

Well, I ... (BILLY struggles unsuccessfully, and is quickly left panting.) This is impossible. I'm going to die in this chair!

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "The voice inside told him to assess the situation, turn his negatives into positives."

BILLY

Positives?? I'm tied up, with no--

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) Positives that included his total lack of muscle."

BILLY

All right, I'm a pencil necked geek! You don't have to rub it--

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "By using his silly putty stature, he could squirm out of his bonds."

(BILLY shrugs and tries it. After a few moments, he pulls his arms free.)

BILLY

Wow, I'm -- I did it! Am I really ... Are you going to let me--

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "Freedom, however, is a double edged sword: earning it is one thing; knowing what to do with it, another."

BILLY

But the ... (Points to the gun.)

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "To make sure the hand cannon didn't enter the picture, he'd have to snatch it."

BILLY

But my pacifist ways.

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "Then he thought: no sense being a *dead* pacifist."

(Beat, then BILLY snatches the gun.)

BILLY

Yes!

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "A revelation: decisive action leads to power."

BILLY

All right, just -- just stop it. You're off the wall.

DIRK

Have to be to write modern noir.

BILLY

Don't worry, you'll find plenty of it in jail. (He dials his mobile phone.)

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "It was too good to last: our modern man of noir slunk back to geekdom."

BILLY

Stop that.

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "He used his emasculating techno-gadget to take the easy way out: calling the flatfoots to clean up his mess."

BILLY

My mess? I didn't make --

DIRK

It's your noir story.

BILLY

You're crazy. (Into phone.) Hello, I'd -- (To himself.) Great, a recording.

(BILLY remains on hold as DIRK keeps typing. Beat, then BILLY peaks over DIRK'S shoulder.)

BILLY

What are you ...?

DIRK

(Typing and narrating.) "The short-lived modern noir hero resigned himself to a life of gadgets, gizmos and a garage, wasting his one chance to break out of his mediocre, me-too existence."

BILLY

What, I'm supposed to help you turn back the clock?

DIRK

Even an old gumshoe like me knows that can't be done.

BILLY

Then what--

DIRK

It's how you carry yourself. A position you take. An attitude. A--

BILLY

(Reacting to live voice on phone.) Yes, I'd like to report a, uh ... It's, um -- well ... (Sighing.) Sorry, wrong number. (HE hangs up.) So where's the story go from here?

DIRK

Lower your voice.

BILLY

(Whispering, sotto voce.) So where's the story--

DIRK

Not that way. Deeper. More rasp. And hitch your shoulders.

BILLY

(Taking a "Cagney/Bogie" stance and voice.) So, uh, where we taking this?

DIRK

First, we need a case.

(BILLY's phone rings. He throws it on the floor and smashes it, then kicks it offstage.)

BILLY

How about the case of the bludgeoned PDA phone?

DIRK

It's a start.

BILLY

Where's that whiskey? (DIRK pulls out the bottle and a glass.) Don't need the glass.
(He drinks from the bottle, almost gags, then regains his Cagney/Bogey demeanor.)
All right, get this down. (DIRK takes dictation.) "He was a hard, bitter mug. An ex-geek who moved on to bigger and better cases...."

DIRK

Now we're rolling.

BILLY

Don't interrupt. (DIRK resumes taking dictation.) "Then she walked into the room: tall and hard, with a look that was all business. 'My phone's missing,' she purred.

DIRK

Yeah!

BILLY

"He shot back, (Reverting to whiny geek voice.) 'Gee mom, I don't know where you put it.'"

DIRK

"Mom??"

BILLY

She's always losing her--

DIRK

There are no moms in noir.

BILLY

Fine. "She was a voluptuous stranger with a look that dripped danger. She growled, 'Rocco sent me ... for the PDA phone.'"

DIRK

Better.

BILLY

"He nodded, wondering what Rocco -- and this vision of a messenger -- knew about the bludgeoned phone."

DIRK

Go with it.

BILLY

"Then, all hell broke loose."

END